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# Authentic Ideals of Masculinity in Hip-Hop Culture: A Contemporary Extension of the Masculine Rhetoric of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements

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Hip-hop culture has long been praised by critics and fans for its graphic expression of black lived experience and its embodiment of the motivations and struggles of black youth in particular.[1] Initially a subculture that existed at the periphery of mainstream culture, hip-hop's remarkable ascendancy in the 1990s created a contradictory situation in which its artists and fans were now members of the mainstream they had previously defined themselves against.[2] As a result, hip-hop artists participate in a deliberate struggle to maintain a "pure" identity, an effort that, according to Kembrew McLeod, is founded on an invocation of the concept of authenticity in an attempt to establish clear boundaries around their culture.[3]

Specific ideals of gender and racial identification lie at the centre of hip-hop's authenticity. Primarily, hip-hop's espousal of a lived urban experience breeds a racial ideal based around "street" credentials, found in the music of gangsta rap artists such as Tupac Shakur. Rappers seek to "keep it real" by telling "explicitly racialised (black) ghetto stories," and enacting a specifically masculine toughness that rejects valid feminine understandings of, and agency in African American life.[4] In placing urban existence, or "the ghetto," at the core of valid African American life Michael Eric Dyson maintains that male rap artists idealise the ghetto as the foundation of African American identity and authenticity, and that

[1] Andreana Clay, "Keepin' It Real: Black Youth, Hip-Hop Culture, and Black Identity," *The American Behavioral Scientist* 46:10 (2003): 1346.
[2] Kembrew McLeod, "Authenticity within Hip-Hop and Other Cultures Threatened with Assimilation," *Journal of Communication* 49:4 (1999): 136.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Michael P. Jefferies, "Hip-Hop Urbanism Old and New," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38:2 (2014): 708.

by claiming knowledge of "ghetto styles and sensibilities" rappers are asserting their legitimate masculinity.[5] Defined by a nihilistic attitude and aggressive pretence, as well as the manipulation of fashion, body language and other aesthetic signifiers, this dominant brand of contemporary hip-hop masculinity is reflective of an earlier form of black male empowerment: "cool pose."[6] Developed in the mid-twentieth century in opposition to the governing, white ideals of masculinity, cool pose can be described as a reaction to exclusion from the rituals of white men and the new black bourgeois. The principles shared between these two aesthetic frameworks are remarkably similar. Both hip-hop masculinity and cool pose immortalise an archetypal male whose participation in violence, crime, and misogyny is lauded, emulated, and used to validate their experience as an African American male. Within the concept of hip-hop masculinity, therefore, exists a so-called narrative of black purity; rhetoric that Michael Jeffries explains is "propagated from many points on the ideological spectrum of racial politics."[7]

There is an assumption surrounding hip-hop culture and rap music, which contends that black identity is authentic by default, while white identity can be either questionable or entirely invalid.[8] As such, hip-hop's notion of authenticity is not only tied to its masculine ideals, but is also bound to its representations of African American identity. This authenticity puts emphasis on a performer's efforts to stay true to himself, and his racial and urban identity. This notion of "keeping it real" has grown out of African American rhetorical traditions such as testifying, and bearing witness, in which the right to expression is merited by purported

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[5] Michael Eric Dyson, *Making Malcolm: The Myth and Meaning of Malcolm X* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 115.

[6] Peter J. Ling and Sharon Monteith, *Gender and the Civil Rights Movement*, 1st pbk. ed. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2004): 119.

[7] Michael P. Jeffries, *Thug Life: Race, Gender, and the Meaning of Hip-Hop* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011): 6.

[8] Anthony Kwame Harrison, "Racial Authenticity in Rap Music and Hip Hop," *Sociology Compass* 2:6 (2008): 1783.

knowledge collected through lived experience.[9] Subsequently, hip-hop authenticity is realised when an artist presents as a unique individual whilst simultaneously connecting with the fundamental, shared aspects of hip-hop culture.[10]

Hip-hop masculinity is a concept that also defines itself against femininity. While pursuing the ideal of the aggressive, virile man, rap artists perpetuate a highly sexualised and subservient representation of women in hip-hop. Dyson describes this as "the extension of the crotch politics of black machismo," involving the subordination of black women's desire to black male desire and the colonising of the female body under the "imperialistic gaze of black men."[11] Emblematic of this pursuit is the dichotomy in the depiction of African American women as either a "ho" (Tupac – "I Get Around") or a "mama" (Tupac – "Dear Mama," and "Keep Your Head Up"), a contemporary rendering of the traditional Madonna/whore complex.

Charise Cheney asserts that a growing dependence of rap artists' authenticity on their masculine street credentials is a direct result of the increasing commercial success of hip-hop.[12] Peter Ling and Sharon Monteith also link the development of this particular image of black masculinity to the commodification of hip-hop culture and its consequential ubiquity.[13] Theodore Ransaw, on the other hand, acknowledges the importance of the representations of manhood and the influence of a particular brand of urban masculinity within hip-hop culture, but suggests this hyper-masculinity stems from the disappearance of coming of age rituals.[14] Ransaw argues that hip-hop has replaced the formal manhood rituals that have been abandoned by numerous communities in an increasingly

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[9] Mickey Hess, "Hip-Hop Realness and the White Performer," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 22:5 (2005): 375.

[10] Ibid., 374.

[11] Meta DuEwa Jones and Michael Eric Dyson, "An Interview with Michael Eric Dyson," *Callaloo* 29:3 (2006): 789.

[12] Charise Cheney, *Brothers Gonna Work It Out: Sexual Politics in the Golden Age of Rap Nationalism* (New York: NYU Press, 2005), 11.

[13] Ling and Monteith, 119.

[14] Theodore Ransaw, *The Art of Being Cool: The Pursuit of Black Masculinity,* (Chicago: African American Images, 2013), http://USYD.eblib.com.au/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=1569195.

Westernised world, providing male adolescents a voice in their pursuit for adulthood and male identity.[15] Ransaw describes the Black male and hip-hop culture as the face of modern masculinity for all males equally, regardless of ethnicity.[16] In doing so, Ransaw discounts hip-hop's exclusive link to a specific African American pursuit of masculinity, ignoring the cultural and historical implications of hip-hop masculinity on the black community.

In overlooking an historical discussion of the gender ideologies of hip-hop culture, either consciously or inadvertently, authors present a circumscribed idea of contemporary black masculinity. While authors acknowledge the continuing importance of racial and gendered authenticity within hip-hop culture, they do not often recognise that these ideals are the extension of an historical racial discourse and make the case that while some historical contextualisation of masculinity in hip-hop has occurred, the aesthetic framework of the "cool pose" allows us to understand facets of hip-hop masculinity so far left un-discussed.

Robyn Wiegman and Matthew Henry locate this "phallocentric perspective" in the hyper-masculine characters of the Blaxploitation films of the early 1970s, including "Shaft" and "Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song."[17] These characters injected the aesthetic ideals of cool pose – virility, violence and control – into the cultural mainstream and, like the jazz artists of decades prior, played a significant role in shaping the complex self-identification of young black men in the 1970s and beyond. Not only did the characters of Blaxploitation films allow African American males an additional conduit through which they could assert their agency in the pursuit of equality, they also highlighted the social positioning of black

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[15] Ibid., 22.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Robyn Wiegman, "Feminism, 'The Boys', and Other Matters," in *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema,* ed. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark. (London: Routledge, 1993), 181; Matthew Henry, "He Is a 'Bad Mother*$%@!#': 'Shaft' and Contemporary Black Masculinity," *African American Review* 38 (2004): 119.

men as straddling the "duality of oppressor and oppressed, where… the African American male is stranded between the competing logics of race and gender."[18] The virile representation of black men in American cinema, who are "at once inside and outside the definitional domains of hierarchical (dis)empowerment"[19] due to the social scripting of both race and gender, remains manifest within contemporary hip-hop culture. The endurance of a hyper-masculine legitimacy in hip-hop is an extension of the "metaphorics of phallic power" defined by the Black Power Movement of the 1960s, and championed by the popular media of the era.[20] This established sense of black masculinity developed out of male activists' endeavours to dispute cultural articulations of black inferiority through alleged gendered authority, and can be seen in the writings and public presence of figures such as Marcus Gavey, Malcolm X, Eldridge Cleaver, and Amiri Baraka.[21] By discussing the hyper-masculinity of hip-hop in essential, non-linear and isolated terms, the future implications of its centrality to African American political, economic and cultural development are underestimated.

Eldridge Cleaver, a controversial early leader of the Black Panther Party, wrote in the late 1960s of the Civil Rights Movement, "We shall have our manhood. We shall have it or the earth will be levelled by our attempts to gain it… [I will] redeem my conquered manhood," epitomising the gendered rhetorical method of the struggle for Black Power.[22] In the context of even contemporary American society black men often remain "rendered impotent in the economic, political, and social arenas that whites have historically dominated."[23] At the inception of the modern Civil Rights Movement, black and white Americans still shared common definitions of manhood. Manhood was essentially an

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[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid., 181.
[21] Ling and Monteith, 122.
[22] Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: Dell, 1968), 66.
[23] Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson, *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America*, 1st Touchstone ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 1.

economic, social and political status that all men wanted to achieve, but that remained unattainable for black men in a society that muzzled their political voice.[24]

Fifteen years later political leader Marcus Garvey identified this black manhood in which "there is no prosperity, no success, no law, no justice but strength and power."[25] As well as upholding strength and power as virtues of black masculinity, Garvey advocated a nationalistic "return to Africa" as the best path to the achievement of black manhood and racial validation.[26] Lawrence Schenbeck terms this concept "ancestral manhood."[27] He explains that through enslavement and subjugation, African Americans' inherited understanding of manhood was lost to the white patriarchy. The West had robbed African American men of the political and economic power they held over women, children and weaker men, and the institutionalised racism that remained unrelenting post-Emancipation, sustained African American males' sense of civic powerlessness.[28]

Yet the notion of "ancestral manhood" was just one strain in this conversation about manhood. According to Kate Dossett, the Garveyite ideal of manliness was also uniquely tied to a patriarchal commitment to providing for families, and assuming the position of a family's sole decision maker and "protector," reflecting in turn ideals perpetuated by the white hegemony.[29] This authority of others was central to both white and black paradigms of manhood

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[24] Steve Estes, *I Am a Man!: Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 7.
[25] Robert A. Hill, Marcus Garvey, and Universal Negro Improvement Association, *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 230.
[26] Kate Dossett, "Staging the Garveyite Home: Black Masculinity, Failure, and Redemption in Theodore Ward's 'Big White Fog'," *African American Review* 43:4 (2009): 560.
[27] Lawrence Schenbeck, "Music, Gender, and 'Uplift' in the 'Chicago Defender', 1927-1937," *The Musical Quarterly* 81:3 (1997): 358.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Dossett, 565.

and was grounded on the theory that the men and women of civilised races, or the middle to upper-classes, had discernible sexual differences.[30] Educated black intellectuals such as Harvard graduate W.E.B. Du Bois and Chicago Defender founder Robert S. Abbott looked towards the western refinements in the dialectic of manhood, which implied that a balance of manly control and a cultivation of the finer things was a marker of successful masculinity. Schenbeck explains, "by exhibiting genteel behaviour and moral, aesthetic, and spiritual refinement," and by pursuing the rituals of white men, such as attending reputable universities, landing prestigious jobs and most importantly becoming the dependable breadwinner for their families, these men hoped to establish a black masculinity, which demonstrated that people of colour were no less evolved than Europeans.[31] This particular endeavour to redeem black manhood, one that mirrored the ideals of the dominant culture but centred on a specifically black ambition, was not deemed possible by those facing socio-economic discrimination in addition to continuous and systemic racial subjugation. Consequently, an alternate conception of black masculinity was conceived.

Against this background African American men created another ritualised form of masculinity that is manifest in the "cool pose" of mid-late 20th century jazz and soul artists. According to Richard Majors, the purpose of posturing "being cool" is to "enhance social competence, pride, dignity, self-esteem and respect," and most importantly assert a form of control within a society that perpetuates unrestrained discrimination.[32] Cool pose is an impenetrable, expressive ideal of black masculinity that is able to unhinge the dominant society rather than contend with the same pursuit of authentic masculinity. It was established by the African American jazz artists of the 1950s and 1960s to challenge dominant cultural assumptions of masculine and racial truths using "musical aesthetics, cultural vision, and personal style."[33] It offered a self-constructed blackness that was a powerful symbol of manhood, as

[30] Schenbeck, 358.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Majors and Billson, 105.
[33] Gray, 401.

an alternative to the dominant discourse. Cool pose was perceived as a social threat because it transgressed the social role assigned to black men by the white hegemony. Like their jazz predecessors, gangsta rap artists embody and express a masculinity that explicitly rejects reigning constructions of both race and gender.[34] The hyper-masculine bravado of contemporary hip-hop stars, like the assertive manhood exhibited in cool pose, demonstrates to the dominant culture that the black male is a survivor despite the realities of racial oppression,[35] but can simultaneously cultivate a path leading to delinquency and criminal activity.[36] By using cool pose to analyse the historical contextualisation of hip-hop masculinity we are able to better frame discussions of the contemporary conditions of black racial identity that remain problematic and disadvantaged.

Jeffries suggests that instead of representing hip-hop as "activity capable of mediating the economic and political neglect, and social disorder in depressed communities," popular rap artists have turned to telling superficial "hood" stories glorifying consumption and sexual conquest.[37] He understands these narratives about "ghetto" life, crime and material excess as being compliant with black subjugation as public representations of blackness are strongly influenced by white demand.[38] The aggressive and often violent expressions of an assertive, heterosexual black masculinity cannot be confined within the dominant cultural logic, however, therefore I argue that the phenomenon of commercially successful gangsta rap and its projection of urban, African American life is a conscious disruption of the existing hegemonic basis of racial privilege. The relationship between the male body and cultural power was evident in the masculine rhetoric employed by the Civil Rights Movement, as well as by those African American men who

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[34] Ibid., 401–2.
[35] Ibid., 5.
[36] Ronald E. Hall, "Cool Pose, Black Manhood, and Juvenile Delinquency," *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 19:5 (2009): 532.
[37] Jeffries, 2.
[38] Ibid., 5.

postured cool, in order to place a political agenda in the dominant position.[39] According to Estes, the African American diaspora "found a powerful organising tactic that rested on traditional assumptions about gender and sexuality,"[40] that now explicitly informs the dominant masculine identities of the "gangsta" and the "politically conscious rapper."

Gangsta rapper Tupac Shakur (1971-1996) encapsulates the political and social threat facilitated by the violent and sexual attributes of an urban, black hyper-masculinity. His music, as well as his publically documented gangsta lifestyle, is symbolic of the hyper-masculine semblance characteristic of "cool pose."[41] His 1996 release "Hit 'Em Up," for example, illustrates a highly aggressive and violent manhood whilst simultaneously voicing a sense of control. Rapping about brutal acts of violence (I'll leave you/cut your young ass up/see you in pieces/now be deceased…fuck with me/and get your caps peeled),[42] Tupac intends not only to intimidate rival "Bad Boy" artists, such as The Notorious B.I.G. and 'Lil Cesar, but is injecting an oppositional comprehension of masculinity into the existing cultural understandings.

The connection to an historical discourse is not only evident in the violent illustrations of gangsta rap but also in its expression of sexuality and its representation of women. Steve Estes asserts that due to the "ever-present threat of lynching for supposed sexual improprieties" the survival of African American men often depended on their ability to mask their masculinity and sexuality.[43] The quest for equality and emancipation manifest in the Civil Rights Movement was not only a struggle for racial equality, but also embedded within it was the desire for a liberated articulation of gender and sexuality. Furthermore, "men dominated the social

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[39] Estes, 8.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Derek Iwamoto, "Tupac Shakur: Understanding the Identity Formation of Hyper-Masculinity of a Popular Hip-Hop Artist," *The Black Scholar* 33:2 (2003): 44.
[42] Tupac Shakur, *Greatest Hits*, Death Row Records/Interscope Records, 1997.
[43] Estes, 2.

and political arenas in which the struggle for rights took place."[44] This authority was clearly reflected in the language used to discuss civil rights, which equated the "rights of man" with the rights of all citizens. The appeal to uncloak sexual expression, as well as the historical connection between citizenship and manhood, was manifest in the virility and sensuality of cool pose, and is sustained in the masculine rhetoric of gangsta rap.

Gangsta rap stimulated an opportunity to express complexities of male sexuality, in a valid public forum, that had previously been denied. While cool pose and its associated rhetoric allowed men to assert a racialised masculinity that validated their presence in the public sphere, its existence undermined the participation of African American women in a shared ambition. Dyson admits also that, "there isn't much room for independent women in rap music and hip-hop culture."[45] Male rappers constantly assert their gendered authenticity over black womanhood. If females are not represented as "whores," they are afforded the equally oppressive categorisation as the virtuous "mama." Both narrow classifications are dependent on a male assignment of identity, and the male colonisation of the black female body. This dichotomy of the "Madonna and the whore" is also rendered in the music of Tupac.

On top of his violent intimidations and urban validity, his sexual prowess and objectification of women was another outlet for Tupac to authenticate his black manhood.[46] In "I Get Around" (1993) Tupac praises men who "keep their hoes in check," marking women as sexual objects while displaying his assertive sexual competence (don't be picky, just be happy with this quickie… 2pacalypse don't stop for hoes, I get around/why I ain't call you? Ha ha please).[47] Like the cool pose of the 1950s and 1960s, Tupac's declaration of his sexuality, and his projected image as a "player,"

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[44] Ibid.
[45] Jones and Dyson, 789.
[46] Iwamoto, 46.
[47] Tupac Shakur, *Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z*, Interscope Records, 1993.

or ladies' man, is a symbol of success against racial, political and societal constraints.[48]

Derek Iwamoto maintains that Tupac articulated "positive messages of communal change" in conjunction with his sexualised understandings of black womanhood.[49] In reality, these positive messages were only afforded to virtuous women that fulfilled the role of the morally fortified maternal figure. Songs including "Keep Your Head Up" (1993) and "Dear Mama" (1995) narrate the struggles and hardships of black women existing in poverty-stricken urban neighbourhoods. While Tupac articulates concern and awareness for problems related to women's position and treatment, (wonder why we take from our women/why we rape our women/do we hate our women/I think it time to kill for our women/time to hear our women/be real to our women),[50] he does so in accordance to the male perspective, positioning himself as the individual who possesses power due to his gender, (Tupac cares if don't nobody else care).[51] His public responses to criticism about misogyny only serve to further evidence his established patterns of one-dimensional definitions of valid female participation in African American life. Appearing on the "Arsenio Hall Show" in the wake of allegations of sexual assault in 1993, Tupac stated that he was hurt by the claims because he was raised by women.[52] His assertion that because the women in his life performed the duty assigned to them by traditional notions of gender roles, it somehow negates the possibility of his own misogynistic behaviour and sexual violence, is sexist in and of itself.

In projecting images of violence, sexual objectification and achievement, and in his public responses to allegations of misogyny, Tupac adheres to the understanding of masculinity established by cool pose. The permeating narrative of nonchalant sexual success is an interpretation of black womanhood curated not

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[48] Iwamoto, 46.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Shakur, *Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z.*
[51] Ibid.
[52] http://www.hip-hopvibe.com/2012/03/07/tupac-shakur-interview-with-the-arsenio-hall-show-in-1994-video/ (accessed 10 February 2015).

by the women themselves, but by others. In addition, by displaying empathy only for limited female experiences the rapper deems honourable, and simultaneously silencing their voices, he observes to the dominant masculinity and problematic role of women that pervaded the rhetoric of the Black Power Movement, in which females were offered few official roles in their pursuit of the same civil liberties.

Tupac's flaunting of sexual success and violent existence is intended to provoke a society that has endeavoured to detain the desires of its black communities, and is marked "by a symbolic homelessness from notions of mainstream American morality, political relevancy and cultural gravitas."[53] This homelessness finds a more explicit manifestation in the politically conscious music released in response to the 2005 natural disaster, Hurricane Katrina. In the wake of the incredibly destructive tropical cyclone, Mark Anthony Neal states that the displaced African American communities were deemed little more than refugees, "reinforcing the presumed inhumanity and foreignness of this population."[54] In reducing the black diaspora affected by Hurricane Katrina to refugees, the corporate media disregarded their explicit national citizenship and agency.

Hip-hop artists responded to the disaster with songs that engaged with the racialised discourse that framed survivors as refugees.[55] Local New Orleans artists such as 5th Ward Weebie, as well as some of the most recognised names of mainstream hip-hop like Jay Z, exhibited a masculine authenticity in response to continued racial discrimination. Because of systemic inequity that affected housing, geographic location, job distribution and subsequent rescue efforts, black communities bore a disparate share of the personal, economic and environmental consequences

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[53] Mark Anthony Neal, *Looking for Leroy : Illegible Black Masculinities* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 36.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Zenia Kish, "'My Fema People': Hip-Hop as Disaster Recovery in the Katrina Diaspora," *American Quarterly* 61:3 (2009): 671

of Hurricane Katrina.[56] The classification of black evacuees as refugees construed them as "outside the norms of middle-class white citizenship, and indeed, a threat to it."[57] In the same way that the Civil Rights Movement disputed the denigration of the African American community as one not deserving of human rights, the black public sphere protested the racism suggested by the use of the term "refugee."

The localised New Orleans genre of "bounce" employed a masculinity of assertiveness and strength to disrupt such discourse. Generated in the late 1980s, bounce is oriented towards dancing, sex and violence. Songs such as 5th Ward Weebie's disaster anthem "Fuck Katrina (The Katrina Song)," invoke an ideal of aggressive black manhood to combine political incentive with the familiar bounce beat. Weebie criticises former U.S. president George Bush and aid agencies like the Red Cross for abandoning African American victims.[58] He personifies Bush and Hurricane Katrina as "bitches" and "hoes" who "fuck over [his] people," condemning and rejecting the feminine, like the hyper-masculine cool posturers of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, in order to legitimise his masculinity in the face of racial persecution.

Many mainstream hip-hop artists also exploit the image of the hustler, and evoke cool pose as a strategy to promote racial uplift. The emergence of the hustler in songs like Jay Z's "Minority Report" (2006)[59] is an explicit refusal of the alienating label, "refugee."[60] In response to the dehumanisation of African American evacuees, Jay Z urges survivors to "hustle their way back to agency, autonomy, and the restoration of selfhood."[61] The hustler is a figure engulfed by impenetrable cool and machismo, and is an economically viable ideal of masculinity that Jay-Z promotes as "the only means by which Katrina evacuees can hold their own in [a] racialised economy,"[62] (it's a dirty game so

[56] Ibid., 672.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid., 677.
[59] Jay Z, *Kingdom Come*, Roc-a-Fella, 2006.
[60] Kish, 678.
[61] Ibid., 685.
[62] Ibid.

whatever is effective/from weed to selling 'kane, gotta put that in effect). Like operators of cool pose, the hustler positions himself outside the law and dominant pursuits of masculinity. The hustler, instead, creates "an autonomous social and economic sphere in which his wealth and social standing are strengthened" through a divergent experience of manhood.[63] Unlike the refugee, or the masculine figure of the "provider," the hustler does not seek inclusion in any pre-existing definition of manhood, but establishes the black male as a survivor.

The masculine identities exhibited by both gangsta rap, and the politically conscious responses to Hurricane Katrina are not autonomous conceptions of manhood limited to the sphere of hip-hop culture. Rather, they pervade African American society and can be seen as linear developments of the masculine ideals perpetuated by, and generated in response to, the modern Civil Rights Movement. Gangsta rap is emblematic of the duality of hip-hop masculinity; male rappers' agency, illustrated by the thematic content of their music described above, is afforded to them through historical rhetoric and forces, shaping the media and art representative of black masculinity. In analysing hip-hop masculinity against the historical and aesthetic framework of cool pose, and the masculine rhetoric of the Civil Rights Movement, we can understand the problematic gender dynamics of hip-hop culture in more expansive terms. The assertion of male identity over womanhood, evidenced in details of all three rappers examined here, is an explicit extension of historical rhetoric in which the aspirations of man were placed above those of women in pursuit of human rights. In undertaking further historical contextualisation of masculinity in hip-hop culture, using the aesthetic framework of cool pose, we can more comprehensively navigate the perception that in order to liberate racialised ideals in the public discourse, gendered identities must suffer such oppression.

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[63] Ibid., 687-88.

# ABSTRACT

The production and interpretation of hip-hop culture, particularly rap music, revolves around the concept of authenticity, or "keeping it real." This authenticity is constructed by its artists and consumers from both racial and gendered ideals. The discourse surrounding hip-hop culture is centred on the belief that in order for one to participate in hip-hop, and for their participation to be considered authentic, they must adhere to, and define themselves, according to its dominant racial and gendered identity. This authentic hip-hop identity is predominantly African American and primarily encompasses an aggressive brand of masculinity. Authors, however, often overlook hip-hop culture's understanding of authenticity as an extension of historical racial discourse. The masculine rhetoric of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, and more specifically the aesthetic ideals of "cool pose," has embedded itself in the continued efforts of African American men to define themselves against a dominant white culture. As the proclaimed "voice of a generation" these efforts are manifest in the music, the artists and the fans of hip-hop culture.

Looking at artists such as Tupac, Jay Z, and 5th Ward Weebie, I argue that their representation of hyper-masculinity, through their work and public image, is an active attempt to mediate economic, social and political neglect prevalent within the African American urban community. This notion of authenticity is not merely the glorification of wealth, consumption, criminal activity and violence, but a contextually relevant endorsement of a particular black manhood that is the contemporary reflection of the masculine rhetoric of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements.

# AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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